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PAGES FROM A SKETCHBOOK

Scheveningen, Holland, circa 1900

1 THE BOULEVARD, 1894

And we had quite become accustomed
to seeing the fleet left high and dry
for there was no true harbour
or really any need for one:
necessity has always been
mother to invention and lack of depth
in a treacherous harbour mouth
had long ago led to flat bottomed vessels
that horses drew onto the beach
and high tide floated out again.

But seeing half the fleet
left high and dry and battered,
others torn loose and floated
out to sea, and only
those that were on the fishing grounds
off Scotland left unscathed,
was a sight we were not prepared for.
This storm that whipped a king tide
through our streets has left a bitter legacy:
our livelihood, the fishing fleet, beyond repair.

2 KEIZERSTRAAT

This bustling narrow thoroughfare
we call affectionately "The Street"
breeds more of gossip even
than the waterfront. . . You meet

your neighbour for a brief and
most informal chat, exchange a word
or two about the weather or how
the young are getting on. . . “My
how they’ve grown! So quickly they have
flown and nested and bred their own. . .”

Why, just today
I thought I’d call around
to Dijkhuizen’s for a fine cigar
and three times heard, and each
with more details, how by the beach
my neighbour’s son proposed
to a sweet young girl I picture still
with blond curls, bouncing on my knee. . .
And so they move and spread their line
and I stay here and write of mine.

from SITTINGS FOR A FAMILY PORTRAIT

